



BULBS MAKE GREAT COMPANIONS

An easy way to achieve season long beauty in a well-appointed garden is to incorporate bulbs as companions to existing plantings. Early spring bulbs are invaluable in their ability to "shorten" winter. At mid-spring, they are great mixers with woodland wildflowers. During the peak flowering period of spring, they can complement the colors of shrubs and trees. And, when inter-planted with summer perennials, they can add a layer of complexity that is a feast for the eyes.

In the palette of items to use in the home landscape, bulbs often fall into the category of 'most missed opportunity' because they are not available to shoppers until autumn. Bulbs must be planted in the fall in order to have bloom in the spring.

A few basics...Bulbs like to be dry during their dormancy. They will perform outstandingly on raised beds or berms. Look around the yard now and avoid locations that gather water, for excess moisture will shorten their lives. Try to locate bulbs in sunny areas, although very early blooming bulbs tolerate shady forest locations. Resist the urge to cut back the declining foliage

until it has yellowed - until then, the bulb is being replenished with nutrients for next year's growth. Fertilize with bulb fertilizer when planting, in subsequent fall seasons or as the foliage is emerging in spring.

European garden style promotes using bulbs in large masses. The new American garden style offers a uniquely different approach. Bulbs are woven into the fabric of the garden. The outcome is a rich Impressionist's palette of blooms filled with one-of-a-kind combinations.



Plant bulbs amongst hostas.

Some bulbs have a remarkable ability to bloom within a few weeks of first breaking through the ground. White snowdrops, blue or white scilla, winter aconite and multi-colored crocuses provide color before anything else stirs in the garden. Their petite, colonizing habit is a perfect fit for the role of 'bulb groundcover'. These earliest bulbs can dominate a bed by themselves or can be planted into existing groundcover. Where the

groundcover beds may bloom in May, early bulbs may begin as soon as February (Snowdrops, Eranthis) or March (Scilla, Crocus) and then become dormant by the end of May. This means that a groundcover area can have two different seasons of bloom! In order to install these diminutive bulbs, no major excavation is necessary. Just cluster handfuls of bulbs in 1-3" deep holes, cover, and time will help them increase their numbers.

Mid-spring bloomers fill the period between last snow melt up to bud swell of trees and shrubs, roughly mid-April thru early May. This is the same period when native woods bloom across their forest floor and European alpiners explode with color. Install these mid-season bulbs in grouped plantings in between existing perennials, a method called 'bouquet planting'. The low, mounded habit of most alpiners creates the perfect mat of color for the bases of many medium height bulbs. White candytuft interplanted with red Emperor tulips is a crisp and classy combo. Alpine blue forget-me-nots matched with graceful, white 'Thalia' narcissus and double pink 'Angelique' tulips create a serene, pastel picture.

Native woodland plants contribute a delicate, lacy look to the garden in both their foliage and blooms. White rue anemone planted in drifts with accents of pink multi-flowering tulips and naturalizing dwarf Chionodoxa bulbs offers an improved woodland vignette. Bouquets of classic white daffodil 'Mt. Hood' planted near clusters of yellow marsh marigold (Caltha) will lighten up any corner of the garden.

Large bouquets of any type of large flowering daffodil can be interplanted in daylily borders or beds of ornamental grasses. Although these perennial companions will be dormant during the period that the daffodils are showiest, their emerging growth later will obscure the declining bulb foliage. This is a marriage made in garden housekeeping heaven!

Late spring brings taller and more exuberant perennial companions as well as the tallest flowering bulbs. The sheer numbers of perennials and bulbs blooming at this time allow for an exercise in color echoing. Color

echoing involves repeating the same color throughout a grouping and varying the texture or form that carries that color.

Purple goblet-shaped tulip 'Purple Prince' paired with purple lily-flowered tulip 'Maytime' and accented with chartreuse-flowered Euphorbia exhibits not just color echoing but the newest trend for color in the garden. Use saturated colors like purple, deep blue and burgundy to extend the color range beyond pastels.

Late spring flowering lilacs, crabapples and magnolias can be dressed at their bases by adding bulbs and perennials that have a similar bloom time. Pink 'Prairiefire' crabapple can be beautifully dressed with blue wood hyacinth bulbs interplanted with Tiarella's white pipe cleaner-shaped blooms. The length of bloom in these plants will last much longer than the tree, an added bonus. Static, low growing junipers can have late tulips planted behind them for a stunning color impact. Try the classic, 28" tall, salmon red tulip, 'Temple of Beauty', with its lovely lily-shaped blooms in back of the steel blue foliage of 'Blue Chip' or 'New Blue Tam' juniper.

Early summer has all of the most familiar gardener's perennials in bloom. But the population of bulbs is not quite finished. The

Alliums, very ornamental relatives of the common onion, are a very special group. The flower clusters are all ball shaped, 1" to 10" fireworks of blue to purple or burgundy.

Try pairing singularly planted bulbs of pale purple *Allium christophii* with early summer red daylilies like 'Chicago Rosy' or the mauve blooms of *Rosa rugosa* 'Scabrosa'. This large-flowered allium makes a beautiful dried flower head once it has gone dormant in August. More petite in bloom is blue *Allium caeruleum*. Pair clusters of this June-bloomer near the pale yellows of *Achillea* 'Anthea' (yarrow) or the variegated foliage of *Polemonium* 'Brise D'Anjou' (Jacob's ladder) and *Iris pallida* 'Aurea Variegata'.



Thoughtful pairings of bulbs with groundcovers, perennials, shrubs and trees can open a garden to a world of possibilities.